



Al-Risala 1987

March

Editorial

In any period of great religious or intellectual transformation there are always two distinct kinds of movements. One is launched positively, on the basis of some discovery which is held to be great benefit of mankind, whereas the other is a negative process set in motion out of a sense of deprivation, or in order to recover something which has been lost. The Islamic movement, for its part was certainly launched with a prior sense of having found something of inestimable value, but we have to ask ourselves in this day and age whether, as a movement, it has been gaining or losing in momentum.

The wonderful sense of discovery with which the companions of the Prophet were imbued was that of having become aware of the oneness of God, in contradistinction to polytheism. The realization had come to them that the life hereafter – man's entry into paradise – was the only goal worthy of man's endeavours. They learned too that a life devoid of principle was one of utter degradation and that the highest human objective should be to become a man of principle. They had been stirred to the very core of their beings by this thought. Their very souls had been moved by it, their minds enlightened, and new doors to reality opened before them. Their lives were so truly transformed by this idea, that it was a kind of re-birth for them. Although whatever they had gained in the process was apparently non-material—a thing of the mind – it was so great a thing for them that it took precedence over all else. This discovery gave them the strength to remain content, even when bereft of all their worldly possessions. No sacrifice was then too great for them to make.

Another benefit of their discovery was that it conferred upon them the position of *Dayees*, conveyors of the divine message to the entire world. Let me stress that it is important at this point to understand the essential difference between a *Dayee* and a national leader. The latter is one who, at the apex of the ruling party, expects to be able to command others and to make demands upon them, whereas the *Dayee* is always the giver. He never takes anything from others. His role is always positive, beneficent.

What the companions of the Prophet had was greater than anything else in this world. What they had discovered was a guarantee that they might stand before the world as givers, not takers. It was this characteristic which endowed them with such irresistible power, and it was not long before the greater part of the inhabited world came under their sway, for their moral superiority was undeniable.

But this, regrettably, cannot be said of present-day Muslims, who parrot the names of the Prophet's companions without their religion being in any sense a great discovery for them. Hence this desire of theirs to appear before the world in the garb of national leaders, and not as *Dayees*. The Muslim image in the world today is that of the taker, not of the giver. And that being so, the man behind the image is utterly without value. It is his sense of loss

which motivates him, and not his sense of gain. Propelled by such people, the Islamic movement is doomed to lose in momentum, and it will not be long before it comes to a complete standstill unless we take measures to re-energize it. We must surely undertake individual and mass reforms, returning to the basic tenets of Islam, if we are not to be swamped by total moral inertia.

Winning over opponents

When Khalid ibn Said ibn Aas returned from the Yemen, the Prophet had already died, and allegiance had been sworn to Abu Bakr. Appealing to the tribal honour of Uthman and Ali, Khalid addressed them saying: "Are you of the Bani Manaf content that others should lord over you?" Umar mentioned Khalid's remark to Abu Bakr, who did not display any outward reaction. But he kept Khalid's remark in mind for the next three months, which passed without Khalid swearing allegiance to Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr then went to see Khalid in his home. Khalid himself asked the Caliph if he would like him to swear allegiance. "I would like you to join in the pact that all Muslims have entered into," replied Abu Bakr, whereupon Khalid promised that he would swear allegiance that very evening. According to Khalid's daughter, Umm Khalid, Abu Bakr always retained a good opinion of her father and used to extend him much respect. (Ibn Saad)

Prophets of Old

Abd Allah ibn Abbas tells of how the Prophet, on reaching Medina after his emigration from Mecca, found the Jews fasting on the day of Ashura – the tenth day of the month of Muharram. He asked them what the special significance of that day was that they should make it a day of fasting. “This is a day of the greatest importance,” they replied. “It was on this day that God rescued Moses and his people, at the same time drowning their enemies. Moses, in thanksgiving, fasted on this day, and we follow his example.” “We are more worthy, and we are closer to Moses than you,” the Prophet replied, and he thereupon declared that day a day of fasting, exhorting his followers to do likewise.

It is clear from this incident that the practices of the ancient prophets are to be followed by Muslims, as was done in pre-Islamic times. Bearing this in mind, we should give our attention to another aspect of Moses’ mission which sets an important example for the Muslims of today.

When Moses began his mission to Egypt, he came into contact with two separate groups of people – the Pharaoh’s clan, known as Qabtaeans, and the Children of Israel. The latter were the Muslims of their day, but, like the Qabtaeans, had strayed far away from divine guidance. The Qabtaeans’ transgression took the form of idolatry and paganism and while the Children of Israel professed true religion, their religious practices were, in fact, a crude distortion of the teachings of their prophets. Moses, born amongst the Children of Israel, was charged with the task of reforming his peoples. He did not, however, wait until his own people had mended their ways before he conveyed the message of God to Pharaoh. He carried out both tasks simultaneously, addressing himself both to the Qabtaeans and to the Children of Israel.

The example of Moses clearly shows what a Muslim’s course of action ought to be. That is, even where Muslims themselves are in need of reform, the task of communicating the message of Islam to non-Muslims should not be delayed until Muslim reform has been accomplished.

Working Together

In the days of the steam engine, the engine drivers had no option but to stand at close quarters to a blazing fire. It was all part of being an engine driver, and without that no train could have run. Much the same thing happens to the individuals who make things go in civic life. They are confronted by the blazing fire of their own anger at other members of society.

They rage at wrongdoers, cheats and shirkers, both real and imagined. But just as the engine driver controls both the fire which drives the engine and his own desire to escape from it. So the individual in society must tame both his own fury and a desire simply to run away from adverse situations. If a society is to hold together and function in harmony, individuals must learn to bear with those who oppose and hurt them. There is no group of people in which differences of opinion do not arise; no group in which there are never feelings of grievance and resentment. It would indeed, be unrealistic to expect that everything should be plain sailing.

How then can people live and work together? How, with seemingly irreconcilable differences between individuals, can society be welded into a cohesive whole? There is only one way: people must bury their differences and agree to disagree. But this can happen only if people react coolly and rationally in difficult situations where relations are strained and there seems no way out of the dilemma. It can happen only if people are fully aware of their responsibilities towards others, as individuals, and towards their community as a whole.

This may seem to be asking the impossible. But this is not so. Every individual does these things in the most natural way within his own domestic circle. In quite normal families, differences of opinion occur almost every day, but the bonds of love and kinship prevail and grievances are finally buried. It is in this way that a family holds together. Every home is a practical example of people agreeing to disagree.

This spirit of give and take which is a matter of instinct in a family, is something which can emerge in a community only through conscious effort on the part of its members. While it is an emotional bond that keeps families from disintegrating, it is a rational effort which cements society, constraining its members to hold together despite all differences.

Two Types of People

“By Teen and Zaytoon, Mount Sinai and this inviolable city. Certainly we created man with the most noble image and in the end we shall reduce him to the lowest of the low; except the believers who do good works, for theirs shall be a boundless recompense. What then, can after this make you deny the Last Judgement? Is Allah not the best of judges?” (95:8)

Teen and Zaytoon are hills in Palestine near which is situated Bayt al-Maqdis, the place where Jesus Christ was born and received his vocation. Mount Sinai is famous for being the place where God spoke to Moses. The “Inviolable city” – Mecca – is the place where prophethood was conferred upon Muhammad. It is mentioned in the Bible that “The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.” (Deuteronomy, 33:2). In the eyes of the Jews, the greatest man ever was Moses, while, for the Christians, it was Jesus. The Quran specifically mentions the names of these ancient and hallowed prophets along with that of the Final Prophet in order to emphasize how, with their advent, came the demonstration of a great truth, namely, that human beings must be placed in two quite opposite categories: the noble, and the degraded – the “lowest of the low”. When a prophet comes to the world, he comes to preside over God’s tribunal, separating one class of individuals from the other like the wheat from the chaff. His preaching is like the powerful churning action which separates the butter from the buttermilk. In this way, he draws a distinct line between those who bow to the truth and those who flout it. When such a difference exists between these two types of people, how can their fates be identical? Clearly, those who display contumacy for the divine message will burn forever in Hell, whilst those who accept it will reside forever in Paradise.

In any settlement, whenever a preacher from God arises to address a gathering, it is like God Himself speaking to the people through a human tongue. While some people respond positively to this call, there are others who deny it. It is those who have kept their true natures alive who recognize the call to truth, just as a child recognizes the call of its mother and responds to it. They recognize as a call from God and run to do His bidding. It makes such an impact upon the intellect that they are immediately imbued with feelings of submission, humility and devotion. Seeing the truth for what it is, they direct the wagon of their lives along the path of God. Nothing, not even self-interest, questions of honour or fears of inexpediency, can stop them from treading this path. But there are others who, having corrupted the vision and hearing which God gave them, are unable to hear His call or read his signs, be they plain as plain can be. Transitory interests, public pressure and personal expediency loom so large on their horizons that they attach an exaggerated importance to them, forgetting that there is nothing so vital in life as the truth. Having put worldly needs above all else in life, they have thrown the imperatives of the next world to the winds. Lost in themselves, they fail to turn to God.

The Prophet said: " When one of you recites *At-teen waz-zaytoon*, and he comes to the end of it, where it is said that Allah is the best of judges, he should say: 'Surely, and I am one of those who bear witness to this.'"

According to some traditions, the prophet recited this verse, then added: "Glory be to Thee, and surely so!" In the Quran, it is deemed desirable that, when an individual recites this, he should be inwardly moved by what he reads and that his response to the subjects mentioned therein should be sincere and wholehearted.

Burying grudges

Abu Bakr despatched an army to Syria, appointing Khalid ibn Said ibn Aas to command it. Umar, however, questioned the propriety of appointing someone who had taken three months to swear allegiance to Abu Bakr and had rebuked the Banu Manaf clan for allowing another branch of the Quraysh to lord over them. Eventually, Umar's opinion prevailed and Khalid was asked to return the standard that had already been entrusted to him. "It caused me no happiness to be appointed commander," was Khalid's reaction, "nor has it caused me any sorrow to be replaced." Later on, Abu Bakr went to see Khalid. He expressed his regret over having to take the decision to replace him. Furthermore, the Caliph made Khalid promise that he would make no mention of Umar's role in the affair. Until he died, Khalid never ceased to pray for Umar. (Ibn Saad)

The Message of the Quran

“Who but a foolish man would forsake the faith of Abraham? We chose him in this world, and in the world to come he shall dwell among the righteous. When his Lord said to him: ‘Submit,’ he answered, ‘I have submitted to the Lord of the Worlds.’ Abraham enjoined the same on his children, and so did Jacob, saying: ‘My children, God has chosen for you this faith. Do not depart this life except as men who have submitted to Him’. Or were you present when death came to Jacob? He said to his children: ‘What will you worship when I am gone?’ They replied: ‘We will worship your God and the God of your forefathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac: the one God. To Him we will surrender ourselves.’ That was a nation which has passed away. Theirs is what they earned, and yours is what you have earned. You shall not be questioned about what they did (2: 130-134).

The message taught by the Prophet Mohammad was exactly the same as had been taught by Abraham. But it was the Jews, those who prided themselves in being followers of Abraham, who led the opposition to the Prophet Mohammad. Why did the Jews act in this manner? The reason was that the religion that Mohammad taught, and which Abraham had taught before him, was the religion of Islam. Now, Islam means total submission to God, and it was this religion that Abraham handed down to his offspring. But the religion that the Jews practised had nothing to do with total submission to God. Having lapsed into permissiveness and, unwilling to change this lifestyle, they had allowed their religion to degenerate into a series of hollow rituals which they fondly believed would make it easy for them to enter paradise. In the religion that the Prophet Mohammad taught, however, one could gain salvation only by virtue of one’s actions. The Jews, for their part, thought that their affiliation to a nation of saints and prophets would be sufficient to earn them redemption. There was a world of difference then between Islam, the true religion of Abraham, and the religion that the Jews practised and attributed to him. True religion means acceptance of divine guidance, as revealed to man through the Prophets, whereas the religion practised by the Jews was based on their own national legacy, a collection of national traditions which had accumulated over generations among the Jews, but had been distorted from the pure religion which God had revealed to His Prophets.

Attaching oneself to saints and prophets, whether they are living or dead, lulls one into a false sense of security so that, just as one has been attached to them in this life, one will remain attached to them in the next life. It makes one feel that their surplus of good deeds will make up for whatever may be lacking in one’s own. The Jews were so far-gone in this form of wishful thinking that they had invented a dogma of ancestral salvation, laying all their hopes in the holiness of their elders. But it is pure self-deception to think that one person will receive the reward of another’s actions. In fact, everyone will reap the rewards, and bear the burden of his own actions. No one will be made to share in the reward, or punishment, which is awarded to another by virtue of his actions on earth.

One who submits to God finds that he has to face all forms of difficulties in this world. His worldly hopes and ambitions will not necessarily be fulfilled. Yet one who is firm in the faith will not be put off by such adversities; he will persevere, making sure that he leaves this world as a Muslim, so that he can look forward to God's blessings in the next world.

"They say: 'Accept the Jewish or the Christian faith and you shall be rightly guided.' Say: 'By no means! We believe in the faith of Abraham, the upright one. He was no polytheist.' Say: We believe in God and that which was revealed to us, and in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to God we have surrendered ourselves.' If they believe as you have done they shall be rightly guided; if they reject it, they shall surely be in schism. Against them, God is your all sufficient defender. He is the Hearing, the Knowing. We take on God's own dye. And who has a better dye than God's. And we are His worshippers. Say: 'Would you dispute with us about God, Who is our Lord and your Lord? And we are responsible for our actions, and you for yours. To Him alone we are devoted. Or do you claim that Abraham, Ishmael, Ishaq, Jacob and the tribes, were all Jews or Christians? Say: 'Who knows better, you or God? And who is more unjust than one who hides a testimony which he has received from God? He is watching over your actions. That nation has passed away. Theirs is what they earned and yours what you have earned. You shall not be questioned about what they did.'" (2:135-141)

The religion that the Prophet Mohammad taught was the religion of the Prophet Abraham, the very religion to which the Jews and the Christians claimed allegiance. Why was it, then, that they turned away from the Prophet Mohammad? The reason for this was that the religion taught by Mohammad, on whom be peace, taught people to take on the hue of God; to devote themselves to Him entirely. With the People of the Book, (i.e., Jews and Christians) religion had a different meaning. For them religion was a symbol of national pride. The message brought by the Arab prophet hurt their pride, so they turned against him.

Those who consider their own race superior to others cannot accept truth when it manifests itself in some nation other than their own. They believe in prophets who come among their own people, but not in those from far-off places who come among other peoples. The only religion that they are acquainted with is communal religion. The only personalities that they acknowledge are those who belong to their own race. Those who look at religion as worship of God, on the other hand, recognize the truth of every piece of wisdom that God sends down, no matter who teaches it. For Jewish theologians to realize that Mohammad was God's final messenger was not a matter of insuperable difficulty. There was nothing to prevent them from seeing the truth of his religion. They should have proclaimed what, deep down in their hearts, they knew to be true. But they did not accept him as the final prophet, as they were enjoined by God to do, for the simple reason that they were more concerned about their own position and prestige.

Just as the people of old had their just deserts as individuals, so will latter-day generations have what they merit on their own account, for truth is an individual, not an ancestral matter. The mistake of the Jews was to think that contemporary and succeeding generations would be rewarded for the good deeds of their ancestors. The Christians had done the same. Their idea of original sin implied that sins were handed down from one generation to the next. Such beliefs have no basis in truth. Everyone will be rewarded by God according to his or her own personal actions; no one can be held responsible for the deeds of others.

The faith that is pleasing to God is faith "as they believed", that is, faith as the Companions of the Prophet believed. What was so special about the faith of the companions of the Prophet? To understand this, one has to think of the situation at their time. On the one hand, there were the ancient prophets, whose position had been historically accepted by the society in which they lived. On the other hand, there was the Prophet Mohammad, who had just come to the world. A wealth of historical traditions had not built up around his person. Yet in spite of this, they recognized the truth of his message and believed in him. Their belief amounted to acceptance of truth on an abstract level. This belief in truth for the sake of truth is the belief that God recognizes and accepts. When truth becomes a national legacy, or becomes embellished with the greatness of historical tradition, then people tend to believe in it, not for its own sake, but because it has become a source of national pride, because to do otherwise would be to deny history. When truth stands on its own unsupported by history or traditions as it was in the time of the Prophet Mohammad, those who accept it do so for the pure and simple reason that it is the truth. This is pure faith, and it is only faith such as this which is acceptable to God.

11 March 1987

One who lives for the eternal world loses interest in the ephemeral world

Abu Bakr lay sick. He asked to be raised on to the pulpit in the Prophet's mosque, and there he delivered his final sermon. After praising and glorifying God, he went on to exhort people to beware of this World and to avoid placing trust in worldly things. "Put the next world before this world," he said, "Become attached to the hereafter. The more you become attached to either this world or the next, the more you will lose interest in the other." (Ibn Asakir)

Compassion towards the most helpless of creatures

During the march to Mecca, prior to the conquest of that city, the Prophet saw a bitch lying by the side of the road, with a litter of recently born pups which she was feeding. He was afraid that the dogs might be molested by one or other of his men, for the Muslim army was over 10,000 strong. So he told *Jauyl of Damrah* to stand guard beside the bitch until every contingent had passed. (Waqidi)

Putting Aside Petty Issues

Abdullah ibn Abbas tells how, when the Prophet Mohammad's uncle Abu Talib lay sick, he was visited by a group of Qurayshite leaders, among them Abu Jahal, who complained to Abu Talib about the conduct and preaching of his nephew Muhammad. They suggested that Abu Talib should summon his nephew, and tell him to stop abusing the gods of the Quraysh. Abu Talib thereupon sent for the Prophet. When the latter arrived and entered the house of his uncle, there was an empty sitting space in between the leaders of the Quraysh and Abu Talib. Abu Jahal was afraid that, should Mohammad occupy that seat next to his uncle, Abu Talib would feel compassion towards his nephew. So Abu Jahal jumped up and sat in the vacant place. Finding nowhere to sit near his uncle, the Prophet quietly sat down next to the door.

When Abu Talib had finished telling his nephew of the complaints of the Qurayshite chieftains, the Prophet explained that he only wanted one thing of the Quraysh. If they were to accept it, they would become lords over Arabia; even the people of Asia would pay tribute to them. The Quraysh expressed their readiness to make more than just one concession to the Prophet, but wanted to know what it was that he wished them to accept. "That there is no god besides Allah" the Prophet told them, but the Quraysh scorned the idea that all their gods should be made into One God.

When the prophet arrived in his uncle's house, he was faced with provocative treatment by Abu Jahal. He saw Abu Jahal jump up and occupy a seat which rightfully should have remained vacant for the Prophet himself to sit in. Under such circumstances, the Prophet could have contested with Abu Jahal over who had the right to occupy the seat next to Abu Talib. But he did not do so, for he had come for one purpose alone – to communicate to these assembled Qurayshite leaders the message of Islam. Had he come into conflict with them over a petty side-issue, attention would have been distracted from the basic purpose of his mission; he would no longer have been in a position to teach them the Word of Truth, having set himself up as their rival for worldly position. So the Prophet forsook what was rightfully his in order to further his cause.

Those who become involved in petty quarrels over mundane issues have seldom any great goal to achieve, and those who have will never achieve it while they allow themselves to become sidetracked by trivial side-issues.

Pride Comes Before a Fall

There was once a boy, the grandson of a nice successful businessman, who found himself an orphan when he was still in his teens. When his grandfather died, the family business had rapidly gone downhill, and so, he found himself alone, and with no heritage except the memory, of what a great man his grandfather had been. Casting about for something to keep body and soul together, he entered the postal service, where the false sense of pride, which his grandfather's reputation had given him, caused him to be at loggerheads with his fellow-workers. Well-meaning relatives advised him to complete his secondary school education privately while he was still in service, and urged him also to look after the family farm, so that both occupations would bring him a steady and decent income. He would also be able to improve his position in the postal service once he completed his education. He could even become a post-master if he so desired. But somehow the young man had developed such a superiority complex, that he did not see fit to follow their advice, and, one day, when he finally fell foul of the postmaster himself, he left the postal service in high dudgeon.

At this stage, he was still so obsessed by family pride that he neither completed his education nor took in another job. He simply loitered around the town, with nothing to do except sing the praises of his family's past renown. In some strange way this seemed more satisfying to his pride than bettering his own position. He did not even care to farm the family land himself, but gave it over to cultivators who farmed it in return for a share of the produce. In the course of time he married and had a family. By the time he had his sixth child, it was clear that the livelihood he gained in this way was pitifully inadequate. The problem of supporting his family became more and more overwhelming, but he would never admit that the path he had chosen for himself had been totally wrong. He was still too proud for that. Instead of facing up to what his life had actually been, he blamed all his difficulties upon his relatives. His inability to come to grips with reality pushed him further and further downhill. Within a few years from that point he became a physically and mentally broken man.

When One is Broken in Two

When an inanimate object, such as a piece of wood, is broken in two, it remains broken. Never again can it remould itself into one piece. Animate objects, however, live on even after breakages. When one live amoeba is cut in two, it turns into two live amoebae.

This is surely a sign from God, showing us the depth of opportunity that God has kept in store for us live human beings in this world. For a human being, no defeat is final, no disaster permanently crippling. As an animate being, no human can be finally shattered for, when broken, its every piece is welded again into a new, live being, if anything, more formidable than before.

For a human being, failure is not failure at all, for it only serves to make one into a more profound, thoughtful person. Obstacles present no hindrance, for they open up new avenues of intellectual advance. Setbacks do not stunt one's growth, for even if one is crushed into many small pieces, each piece in its own right has the capacity to form the building blocks of an entirely new being.

Such are the never-ending possibilities which God has created for man in this world, but it is only he who is alive to these possibilities who can benefit from them, gathering and marshalling his resources after some shattering setback. When he tastes defeat, he does not lose heart, but prepares himself to issue a new challenge. He rebuilds anew his shipwrecked boat, and, abroad it, restarts his journey through life.

Putting fear into the hearts of the enemy, rendering them unable to offer resistance

After the Quraysh had broken the Truce of Hudaibiyyah, they sent Abu Sufyan as a delegate to Medina, seeking renewal of the truce. The Prophet refuses to renew it. So, when the Prophet set out with an army of 10,000 men, the Quraysh were apprehensive to the point of despair. The Prophet was aware of this, and in order to increase their fears he ordered his men to spread out and each man to light a fire after dark. From the outskirts of the sacred territory, ten thousand camp fires could now be seen burning, and news was quickly brought to Mecca that Mohammad's army was far larger than they had feared. (*Life of Mohammad*, by Martin Lings)

Taking a Long Route

One of the facilities enjoyed in technologically advanced nations is a highly efficient telecommunications system. Of course, telephones abound in the third world also, but the service they provide leaves much to be desired. In India, for instance, one will encounter all kinds of problems in making trunk or local calls within the country. If, on the other hand, one dials a London number from Delhi, one is likely to obtain an immediate connection, and the quality of reception will also be good.

A story concerning this discrepancy appeared in a newspaper recently. An African lady wanted to order some meat from her local butcher. She tried to telephone him, but was unable to get through. But when she phoned her mother, who was living in London, she had no trouble getting a connection there. During the course of her conversation, she casually mentioned her inability to establish contact with a local number. "I wanted to order some meat, and was trying to get through to the butcher for a whole hour," she told her mother. "Tell you what", her mother replied over the line from London. "I'll put a call through to him from this end." And she did just that. She dialled her daughter's butcher back in Africa. Immediately the phone started ringing in a shop thousands of miles away. The gap left by local telephone lines was bridged by international telecommunications.

The necessity to find unusual ways of bridging gaps and speeding up the normal business of life is applicable not only to telephone connections, but to our journey through life itself. But we must first understand what our best course of action is. Sometimes we try to take short cuts, but find them so full of obstacles so that we actually spend longer on the 'short' cut than we would on a long, but unobstructed road. Sometimes a road only appears interminable to us, but when we actually come to traverse it, we find that it has taken us far less time to do so than we had at first imagined. The reverse is true of apparently shorter roads which can lead us into unexpected detours. Before setting out on a chosen path, we should take stock of the means at our disposal and make due allowances for unforeseen factors which could hamper our progress. All such factors should be given equal consideration.

Bearing Witness to the Truth

A Muslim's basic duty in this world is to bear witness to the Truth before mankind. It was to this duty that the Prophet alluded when he said to his followers: "You are God's witnesses on earth." This subject is mentioned time and again in the Quran, from which we build up a comprehensive picture of the actual significance of bearing witness to the truth. Its frequent recurrence in the holy scriptures impresses upon the reader the fact that man has been put upon this earth to be tested. Does he acknowledge the Truth, or does he deny it? Does he mould his life to the encompassing realities, or does he beat his own rebellious path through life? Throughout human existence, this is the test with which man is confronted.

This is no trivial matter. Its seriousness can be gauged from the fact that it is upon the outcome of man's testing period in this life that his eternal future in the next life will be decided. It is on the basis of how individuals are rated in this life that some will be raised up to enter the gardens of eternal bliss, while others will be cast down to suffer eternal damnation.

The name of *Dawah* has been given to the task of spreading the message of Islam. Those who perform it are called witnesses, because it is they who will bear witness in the court of God when all mankind is brought before Him. It is they who will testify before God as to who accepted the Truth and who rejected it.

God has promised the Muslims that He will help them and grant them dominance in the world. For this to come about, however, Muslims must feel themselves duty-bound to perform the task assigned to them. If they stand as witnesses to the Truth, they will rise high in the world. But, if they neglect this duty, their place will be one of ignominy and disgrace.

The individual's whole existence is moulded according to his chosen purpose in life. If Muslims make it their purpose to be witnesses to Truth on Earth, there will take place in them an enormous transformation. Their entire attitude to life will be transfigured. All mundane issues will pale into insignificance as they unflaggingly pursue their eternal goal. Without waiting for a change of heart in others, they will unilaterally put an end to all their wordly conflicts with other nation, and will be content to bear any sacrifice for the sake of peace. They will be fully aware of the fact that it is only if there is peace between Muslims and other nations that non-Muslims will be disposed to listen to them, and to give serious thought to the message they convey.

From Affluence to Ashes

Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894-1983) was the greatest industrial magnate of modern India. He led an extremely principled life, which was the secret of his success. Starting his career with paltry resources at the age of twelve, he reached such a height of success that his family now has wider commercial interests than any other single family in India.

Mr. Birla would always rise at five in the morning, and remain engrossed in his work until 9 p.m. He led a very simple life, often cooking his own meals. He drank coffee instead of liquor, and would take nothing but water in between meals. Whether in India or abroad, he never missed his morning walk. On June 11, 1983 when he was in London, he went out after breakfast for a walk in Regent Street. After a while he felt some discomfort and informed his aides. Alarmed, they brought him back home immediately. No sooner had he reached home than he collapsed. He was taken to London's Middlesex Hospital, where he regained consciousness for a while. "What is wrong with me, Doctor?" he enquired. The doctors told him that they would be able to say within five minutes after a check-up. But he died before the doctors could complete their examination. It was Mr. Birla's wish that his last rites should be performed at the place of his death. Accordingly, he was cremated at an electric crematorium in London, and his ashes were brought to India to be scattered in the rivers of his mother country.

Mr. Birla wrote many books. The Hindi title of one of them is '*Rupaye Ki Kahani*' (Money Story). Mr. Birla's 'money-story' became a story of ashes in the end.

So it is with everyone in this world. Everyone is busy recording his success story, ignorant of the fact that what awaits him at the end of his life's journey has nothing whatsoever to do with material success and has everything to do with moral accomplishment.

Coming to Terms with Sectarianism

Sectarianism among followers of the same religion is almost invariably the upshot of clashes over relatively minor issues, and does not stem as one might imagine, from misinterpretations of, or confusion about fundamental religious tenets. Among Muslims, there is no controversy over the major points of Islamic doctrine, such as, for example, the prophethood of Mohammad – a point on which all Muslims are in accord. It is matters of secondary importance, such as the manner in which blessings should be invoked upon the Prophet, that spark off dissension. For instance, when the Prophet's name is mentioned, the Sunnis invoke blessings on him alone, while the Shias are particular to include his offspring. Differences over such minor points are regrettably all too common.

It is not only to matters of doctrine, but also to the rules of social conduct that this applies. No one would dispute that when two Muslims meet, they should greet one another and shake hands. But, strange as it would seem, there is rancorous disagreement on what form the handshake should take. Those who are of the Hanafi school (a school of jurisprudence) maintain that it should be done with both hands, while others, including those of the Ahl-e-Hadith School, feel that only one hand need be extended. And so there is much needless expenditure of mental energy on something which should not be an issue at all.

Such controversies over minor issues have been a perennial feature in every age of all religious communities. While there is nothing particularly bad about debating such matters, and no great harm comes to the community as a result, there is always the danger that what started as an amicable discussion can develop into an all-out fight to establish the personal superiority of particular groups. Such escalations almost inevitably lead to members of the same religious community becoming estranged from one another, their having quite lost sight of the fact that the whole conflict rests on some triviality.

In any discussion of this nature, tolerance and broad-mindedness should be the prevailing attitudes. Particularly in the case of social behaviour, the acceptability of more than one mode of conduct should be established at the outset, provided that no *moral* infringement is entailed. On such matters, people whose opinions differ should be able to adopt any posture they please without it leading to dissension and bitterness. Personal superiority or inferiority should never be the points at issue.

Another pernicious aspect of becoming preoccupied with side issues is that basic issues become lost in the morass of argument. It is only if proper emphasis is laid upon the fundamentals of religion, that its adherents can remain united.

19 March 1987

How Strange that Life should End Like that

Nandini, daughter of Govind Narain, former governor of Karnataka, was just 38 years old when she passed away in New Delhi on September 16, 1981. Thus a young, vibrant life came to a sudden halt; a cheerful face was removed from the scene of life.

Nandini was an intelligent and healthy person. After receiving higher education in India, she acquired a degree in journalism from America, then became a senior reporter with *The Hindustan Times*. Her versatile and dashing talent made her a popular figure with her colleagues. As one of them put it: "She loved life to the full and wanted to live it to the full."

Several of her colleagues contributed to a commemorative article published in *The Hindustan Times* September 17, 1981. They conclude their article with these words: "It is a cruel reminder of the fact that there is a deadline for everyone."

How strange it is that the flame of life should suddenly be extinguished, a laughing face suddenly grow still to be buried beneath the earth : how strange that a spirit full of hope and aspirations should be removed from the scene of life, leaving all its hopes and aspirations behind in the world.

How meaningful life appears to be and how meaningless it is rendered by its conclusion. How free man appears to be, but how helpless he is before death. How dear he holds his desires and ambitions, only for fate to ruthlessly stamp them out.

Remembrance of death alone should be enough to cure man's rebellious nature. Peace and harmony on earth can only come from man learning his limitations, and resigning himself to them. There is no better way of learning this lesson than by remembering death.

A New Lease of Life

Eric Morecambe, a famous English television personality and comedian, died on May 28, 1984, of a heart attack. His death occurred just hours after he had told an audience at the Roses Theatre in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, how grateful he was for a new lease of life.

For years Eric Morecambe had been haunted by heart disease.

This had led him to ease the punishing workload which had previously threatened his health. His daughter, Gail, said after his death: "Dad had made every effort to look after himself, and had vowed to take it easier. He told me he planned to enjoy all the things he worked for and spend more time with his family. We have been cheated." (*The Times*, London, May 29, 1984).

People think that they are being "cheated" by death, but in fact death is the ultimate and most inevitable certainty of our lives. Death cheats no one. It is man who cheats himself: the plans that he should be making for the world after death he makes for this life, only to find that death awaits him, to put paid to all his dreams.

If man were to set his sights on the next, eternal world, he would find there the fulfillment of his heart's desires; but instead, he aims for fulfillment in this world, where true fulfillment is almost impossible to achieve, and even if it is achieved, it can only be for a very short time. If he were to seek reward for his work with God, then God would never let his efforts go to waste; but instead he seeks reward on earth where reward is scant and, once given, is sure to be taken away again.

Man sees only the world. Death is to him, then, a cruel blow, removing him from the land of his dreams. But if he were to see the world beyond death, he would realize that it is that eternal world of infinite blessings that should be worked for. What "new lease of life" can there be when the spectre of death lies in wait? Those who seek 'new life' will find it only in the world that lies beyond death.

20 March 1987

What makes a person excel is purity of heart

The prophet once said of Abu Bakr: "He does not surpass you through much fasting and prayer, surpasses you by virtue of something that is fixed in his heart." (Tirmidhi)

Ephemerality

The Fabian society was founded in 1883-84 in London, having as its goal the establishment of a democratic Socialist state in Great Britain. The Fabians put their faith in evolutionary Socialism rather than in revolution. They were true pioneers in British social and economic reform, and were concerned mainly with the eradication of poverty and ignorance through education.

The name of the society was derived from that of the Roman general, Fabius Cunctator, whose patient and evasive tactics in avoiding pitched battles secured his ultimate victory over stronger forces. Early members included George Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb, Annie Besant, Edward Pease, and Graham Wallace. Shaw and Webb, later joined by Webb's wife, Beatrice Webb, were the outstanding leaders of this society for many years.

Beatrice Webb's diary, which was published after her death, became very popular. Here is an excerpt from it, written in 1943 during the Second World War:

"Everything and everyone is disappearing – Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin. What an amazing happening, and well worth recording in my diary. But that also will suddenly disappear" (1943).

What outstanding people come into this world, show their mettle and then suddenly disappear; as if their appearance and disappearance were not a matter of their own choice, but the responsibility of someone or something else, who summoned them back quite arbitrarily – like marionettes disappearing at a tug of their strings.

This coming and going of people, this ephemerality of life, remains inexplicable until we accept the existence of a life after death, as the prophets foretold. By taking into account this truth, everything seems to fall quite satisfactorily into place. If life is transient we can accept it as being so, and have no regrets.

But should we reject the actuality of a life after death, everything is rendered void and meaningless.

21 March 1987

As you treat others, so will you be treated

"Do not afflict God's servants, nor revile them nor seek to expose their faults. As for one who seeks to expose his brother's faults, God will expose his faults, until finally he is disgraced in his own home."
(Ahmad).

Keeping One's Mind on Tomorrow

In 1898 Lord Curzon was appointed Viceroy of India. He had two daughters. When Lady Curzon was expecting their third child, both she and her husband were hoping that it would be a boy. Their hopes were dashed, however, when in March 1904, another baby girl was born to them. The couple were staying in Naldara at the time of the birth, and they named their daughter Alexandra Naldara Curzon after the place. Later on Lady Curzon returned to London. In one of the letters that Lord Curzon wrote to her from the summer capital, Simla, he consoled her with these words: "After all, what does sex matter after we both of us are gone."

It is possible that these words were merely an attempt on Lord Curzon's part to hide his frustration. Be that as it may adopting such an attitude can solve most of life's problems, if one becomes really conscious of the value of doing so.

Man desires money, offspring and power more than anything in this world, and he does his utmost to acquire them. But if one reflects upon this, finally one is going to leave all these things behind. What is the good of having something which one is bound to lose? If people were only to realize this, they would become content with what they have. It would put a stop to the oppression and cruelty that is perpetrated on this world out of sheer greed.

There is little difference between finding and losing in this world, for no value can be attached to finding something once it is accepted that one is only going to lose it again. How much effort man puts into acquiring wealth in this world; yet the inevitable result of his efforts is that he leaves everything behind. Every life eventually ends in death. When death comes, it tears one away from the things one was most attached to on earth.

People who live for the present, with no thought for the future, think that they can build happy lives for themselves at the expense of others. They seek to ruin others by bringing lawsuits against them in human courts, but it is they themselves who are heading for ruin; it is they themselves who will be tried and condemned in the divine court of the hereafter. They imagine that they can revel in their own glory, having wrought havoc in the lives of others. But they ignore the well-being of others at their peril. For soon their material props will vanish into thin air – who in this world is not bound for the grave? – and they will be exposed for the helpless creatures that they really are.

Talking Tall

A group of sight seers going around Delhi zoo in the winter of 1985, looked at various animals in turn then paused in admiration before a great rarity – a solitary white lion which was pacing up and down outside its den. “This is the only white lion left in the whole world!” exclaimed a member of the group: “You see, the Maharajah of Rewa owned two white lions, both of which he handed over to the Indian government after independence. One of them died, and we are now looking at the one which was left – the sole survivor of its species!”

If this gentleman had cared to walk a little further, he would have seen a board attached to the white lion’s cage on which the zoo authorities had given detailed information, namely, that 69 white lions still exist in the world today, 25 of which are to be found in India alone. Yet just a few yards away there was a gentleman who claimed that there was just one white lion left in the whole world, and that was the one in the Delhi zoo.

How ignorant people can be of established facts, and yet how keenly they feel the urge to expound their views as if there were nothing in the world that they did not know. Before holding forth on a subject, one should make a thorough study of it for opinions based on inadequate research are bound to mislead the unwary. Empty utterances may impress the ill-informed, but to the knowledgeable, intelligent listener, they are simply a proclamation of the speaker’s ignorance.

Sadly it is often the greatest of ignoramuses who make the weightiest of pronouncements (111:18).

23 March 1987

Attachment to the world makes one lose sight of eternity

"There will come a day when you will be as insignificant as the flotsam carried by a flood," the Prophet once said to his Companions, Who asked him why that would be. The Prophet told them that something he termed "Wahn" would develop within them, and the Companions once again asked what "Wahan" was. "It is to love worldly things, and be reluctant to face death," the Prophet explained.

Knowledge that Helps

The Prophet Mohammad said: "The learned are the heirs of the prophets." On another occasion, the Prophet prayed "Lord, have mercy on my successors." The Prophet was asked who his Successors were, and he answered: "Those who preserve my teachings and pass them on to mankind." As Abu al-Aswad said: "Knowledge is the greatest of powers. Kings rule over people, but the learned rule over kings." Abu ibn Abd Allah said to Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, the 8th Umayyad Caliph: "People say: 'Become learned if you can; if you cannot, at least seek learning; and if you cannot even seek learning, love those who do; and if you cannot love them, at least do not hate them.'" "Glory be to God," said Umar. "For him too God has made a means of salvation."

Jurists have divided the areas covered by the commandments of Islam into several categories: obligatory, supererogatory, unlawful, reprehensible, and so on. Allama Shatibi writes that, as far as self-purification and becoming close to God are concerned, these categories have no importance; and the real aim of religion is self-purification. Whatever helps one achieve that end is desirable whether it is counted as obligatory, or supererogatory, and whatever pulls one in the direction of evil is undesirable, whether it is called reprehensible or unlawful.

As Hasan Basri, a noted 8th century religious scholar, put it: "The greatest knowledge is that which comes from abstinence and meditation" (110:26).

24 March 1987

Earning more money does not make one into a better person

Anas told of two brothers who lived in the Prophet's time. One of them used to come and sit in the Prophet's company, while the other used to earn a living for his household. The latter came to the Prophet and complained about his brother not doing any work, and leaving it to him to do all the earning. "Perhaps it is because of him that you are provided with sustenance." the Prophet told him.

(Riadh al Saliheen)

24 March 1987

Humility raises one to great heights

Abu Huraira reported this saying of the Prophet: "No article is below being given as charity. God makes one who forgives more respected, and He exalts one who humbles himself before the Lord."

(Muslim)

And Knowledge that Harms

The Prophet Mohammad said: "Even more than the Great Deceiver, (*Dajjal*) it is from others that I fear for you." The Prophet was asked. Who they were and he replied: "Wicked men of learning." On another occasion, the Prophet said: "He who increases his learning, but does not increase in guidance, will only become further away from God." Likewise, the Prophet said: "The one who will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection is a man of learning whom God has not benefited through his learning." "On the night when I was taken to the heavens," recalled the Prophet Mohammad, "I passed some people whose lips were being cut with scissors of fire. 'Who are you?' I asked, and they replied: 'We are the ones who used to command good, but we ourselves did not practice it; and we used to forbid evil, while ourselves practicing it.'" This prayer was often on the Prophet's lips: "Lord, I seek refuge with You from knowledge which does not benefit, from a heart which has no fear; from actions which are not lifted up to heaven and from a prayer which is not heard" (113:7).

Dajjal literally means "fake, lying." The name given in the traditions (sayings of the Prophet) to certain religious impostors who shall appear in the world; a term somewhat similar to the word Anti Christ (in Christianity).

25 March 1987

Hardness of heart comes from using religion for worldly ends

"The punishment of a learned man is for his heart to die," said Hasan al-Basri. He was asked what was meant by the death of the heart, and he answered that it came from seeking the world by means of actions which should be gauged towards eternity.

(Jami' bayan al-'ilm wa fadhlihi)

25 March 1987

Rejoicing in the Muslims' prosperity

'Abdullah Ibn' Abbas once said: "Whenever I hear that rain has fallen on a Muslim town I am happy; even though I myself have no cattle grazing there."

(Tabrani)

The Human Personality

If from a vessel containing water a single drop is found to be brackish, it means that all of the liquid is undrinkable. We need sample only one drop to know with certainty what the rest will be like. Much the same is true of the human personality. It is like an over brimming vessel which keeps on shedding drops for other people to savour, to find sweet or brackish as the case may be. Small instances of an individual's behaviour and quite short interludes in his company are generally sufficient to tell us what his overall personality is like – unless we are dealing with the greatest of dissemblers! A thoughtless remark, an unfair maneuver, a failure to give much-needed sympathy or support, a devious transaction-all these are the plain indicators, like those brackish drops of water from the larger vessel, which indicate the lack of integrity or callousness of the person you are dealing with.

The human personality has the same homogeneity as water. A single human weakness cannot therefore be considered in isolation, as if it were an exception. It has to be looked upon as being representative of the entire personality. If an individual proves unreliable in one matter, he is likely to evince the same unreliability in other matters; if he is guilty of untrustworthiness on one occasion, the chances are that this trait will show up time and time again. There is only one kind of person who is an exception to that rule, and that is the one who subjects his own behaviour to constant re-appraisal, who is continually scrutinizing himself for weaknesses and faults and who, once having found such faults, wastes no time in rooting them out.

A man who has made a mistake can completely erase the marks of what is an unfortunate experience for others by admitting his mistake and begging forgiveness. Some people are pricked by their consciences, but do nothing to assuage the ruffled feelings of others, thinking that to do so would be sheer weakness and would mean a loss of face. Such people can never have healthy social relationships and can never win the respect of their fellow men. They do not realize that a man displays his true mettle when he sees his own wrong actions for what they are, and humbly asks forgiveness.

It is only he who has learned the art of moral introspection who will in the long run, prove himself a person of inviolable integrity.

Before Lashing Out, Look Within

While the Prophet was in Mecca, Abd-ur-Rahman ibn Auf, along with some friends, came to him. "We lived in honour when we were idolators", they complained. "But now, with belief, has come disgrace."

"Forgiveness has been enjoined on me", replied the Prophet. "You are not allowed to fight against these people who disgrace you."

This same event is mentioned in the Quran, in the Chapter entitled "Women", where it is said: "Have you not seen those unto whom it was said: 'Withhold your hands, establish worship and pay the poor due ... (Quran, 4:77) This verse has been explained in reliable commentaries of the Quran as meaning that the struggle which a believer wages within his own self, to bring his heart and soul in line with the teachings of Islam, comes before the struggle which he wages against disbelievers. (*Tafsir Mazhari*, Vol. II, p. 165)

What the words of the Quran, "Withhold your hands and establish prayer," convey to us is: "Make inward preparations before resorting to outward action." The true essence of prayer is remembrance of God: "Establish prayer for My remembrance," says the Quran. In Islam, however, prayer has been given a form which establishes it as a complete training for life. Prayer strengthens a Muslim from within, consolidating his faith and preparing him to face the trials of life in true Islamic fashion. For this reason Umar said that one who pays scant attention to prayer will be even less punctilious about other matters of moment.

In Islam, war is only justified in self-defence. The basic duty of a Muslim is not to fight, but to spread the message of Islam. Peacefully and tactfully, he is required to call mankind to Truth. This is where the Islamic process begins, and here also does it end. There is no graduation from spreading the Word to taking up arms; only when their opponents refuse to desist from persecution are the Muslims allowed to fight against them.

But there is a condition attached even to defensive war, namely that Muslims should first have established prayer as a religious duty. What is prayer in its true sense? It is nothing less than a complete course of religious training. First the call to prayer is made, in which believers are invited to "come to salvation." Leaving their daily tasks, the faithful hurry to the place of worship, and after cleansing themselves, join in the prayer. Time and time again during the prayer they repeat the words "God is great", thus acknowledging how small they are in relation to Him. The Muslims join ranks for prayer, lining up behind one leader; no one breaks ranks, or goes his own way. When the prayer is completed, the worshipper, turning to both right and left, repeats a prayer of peace. In this way he demonstrates that his benevolence towards his fellow beings is so great that he feels he must pray for them.

It is not until prayer of this nature has been accepted, not only as a ritual, but as a heartfelt moral responsibility, that Muslims may feel entitled to go forth and conduct a holy war against disbelievers. Prayer is their best training course. Until they have completed it, there is only one thing to do in the face of persecution: show exemplary patience.

Those who call for war against infidels, before they have understood the true nature of prayer are not in any real sense adherents of the religion revealed by God. They are simply following some religion of their own invention. If they cannot, or will not grasp the necessity to change their ways, it will not be salvation that awaits them, but ruin.

28 March 1987

The Prophet did not allow his hand to be kissed

The Prophet bought some cloth from a shopkeeper. The transaction completed, the Prophet got up to leave. The shopkeeper made as if to kiss the Prophet's hand, but the Prophet immediately put his hand behind his back and said: "This is what Asian people do with their kings. I am not a king; I am just one of you."

28 March 1987

The best charity is that which is given to the weakest person

Suraqah ibn Malik says that the Prophet once asked him: "Shall I tell you what the greatest charity is?" "Please do," Suraqah replied. Then the Prophet said: "It is to spend upon a daughter who – after being widowed or divorced – is returned to you, and has no other source of support but yourself."

28 March 1987

LETTERS

It was the first time that I came across such a nice reading of Quranic interpretations in this language. What is very unfortunate is that such an excellent treatise on religious issues has not reached the masses in general. At least the enlightened and educated modern muslims should certainly read this qualitative magazine of yours. May God help you in all the walks for the publication of this nice magazine! (Ameen)

FIROZ BAKHT AHMED

New Delhi

It was a great delight to read two issues (33&36) of AL-RISALA. The size does not restrict the contents. The editorial (36), 'Is this Islam' is very timely and reasonable and also speaks of a modern, truthful and sympathetic mind so much required today.

AMEEQ HANFEE

New Delhi

I am a regular reader of AL-RISALA. I go through it with great interest. It is a magazine to make the Muslims more enlightened.

AFSHAN ASAD

Delhi

For the last 10 months I have been reading AL-RISALA English and Urdu. I found very much interest in these two magazines. When I start reading, I finish it only in 30 minutes. What the topics are! May God continue to bless you in this work which is very useful for the new as well as for old generation.

Your topics on Islam and all other topics in AL-RISALA will help people very much in their motto. I made it very popular among my friends.

JB SINGH

Sringar

A Chance brought me in touch with the July 86 issue of AL-RISALA. The idea of spreading the word of the Prophet is unexceptionable for all great teachers have pointed to the path of good and righteous living and it is enriching to acquaint oneself with their teachings. Looked at from this perspective you are rendering a yeoman's service. The selection of material is catholic and the presentation excellent.

GL SHUKLA

Bombay